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ABSTRACT

In this booklet information is presented on how family day care can best be utilized as part of a larger treatment plan in cases of child abuse and neglect. Child protective services are defined and described and reasons for considering family day care as a resource in child protection cases are discussed. The advantages for the child, the parent, and the child care worker of using family day care as a child protection service are delineated. Aspects which could contribute to maximizing the usefulness of family day care as a resource for child protection are examined, including: (1) careful selection of providers, (2) involvement of family day care providers in treatment plans, (3) examination of the protection service process, (4) administrative issues, (5) professional supports, (6) training, and (7) termination of care. (JMB)

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FAMILY DAY CARE

AS A

CHILD PROTECTION SERVICE

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TRAINING FOR CHILD CARE PROJECT

Southern Regional Education Board
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PREFACE

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)* through its Commission on Mental Health and Human Services first became involved in day care when it coordinated and evaluated the Southeastern Day Care Project from 1970 to 1973. That project conducted demonstration programs in each of the eight states in HEW Region IV to provide the state child welfare agencies with experience in delivering day care services. The primary focus was on day care centers, but family day care received attention in some of the states. Family day care was found to be a desirable option -- both in expanding the scope of delivery systems and in meeting the needs of families and children.

During that project period, there were two invitational meetings on family day care, and several short publications on the subject were produced.

In 1976, the Southern Regional Education Board received funding from the Carnegie Corporation for a project to improve training for child care in the South in three content areas. One of these was training for family day care. In 1977, an additional grant from the Levi Strauss Foundation made it possible to work more intensively in the area of family day care.

It has been the policy to report experiences and information as the project went along -- rather than waiting to include them in a final publication.

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*SREB is an interstate compact devoted primarily to advancing higher education in the 14 Southern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

This publication is one of a series that will be distributed to those who are interested in the development and improvement of family day care. The staff of the Training for Child Care Project would like to thank Dana Friedman for her assistance in compiling and editing information in this publication. Finally, special appreciation is extended to the Carnegie Corporation and Levi Strauss Foundation for making this publication possible.

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INTRODUCTION

Family day care is a child care arrangement in which up to six children are cared for in the home of the caregiver, and is used extensively in the United States by working parents who need care for their children during the day. The Training for Child Care Project of the Southern Regional Education Board developed an interest in family day care because it is so often used and preferred by parents over other forms of child care arrangements. At the same time, there has been little general recognition that family day care providers need public concern and support if the children cared for are to receive a high quality of care and if the family day care providers are to receive adequate income for the services they offer. While family day care is increasingly being used for specialized purposes, it is primarily an effort to help healthy children and healthy families obtain the kind of child care they need.

As the staff of the Training for Child Care Project initiated contacts in communities throughout the South and met with numbers of family day care providers, it became apparent that state human resource agencies often purchase family day care for children of families in which the child has been abused or neglected and placement of the child in a family day care home during the day was part of a larger treatment plan. Relief from the constant pressures of child care enables parents to avail themselves of help for their problems. Day care centers have often provided care for some children whose parents abused or neglected them, but extensive use of family day care homes as a child protection service is recent. Well coordinated family day care can be a helpful placement for children, but this large-scale use of family day care as a child protection service is occurring in a haphazard and unsupported manner.

The experiences of two abused children who received family day care services as part of their treatment plan demonstrate the difference between the ideal and the reality.

Daniel, age five, is the victim of child abuse. His 20-year-old mother is a single parent whose discipline is harsh and inconsistent. He is an active, nervous child who is out of his mother's control.

Daniel's case was referred to the child protection agency through which he was placed in the care of a family day care provider in the community where he lives. The family day care provider was trained and chosen after a careful selection process. She was familiar with Daniel's family background and the legal issues involved in the case.

The family day care provider, the caseworker, a child development specialist, and staff of the local family day care agency met to devise a treatment plan for Daniel and his mother. Daniel's progress was monitored by this team, and appropriate supports were offered to the day care provider to assist in his care. Daniel receives lunches and snacks and is learning to share with other children and to develop inner controls. Although his mother is still impatient with him, the quality of their interaction has improved, largely because she does not have to assume full, 24-hour responsibility for his care.

Elizabeth, age six, is the product of a broken home, where her mother is very involved with her own social life and often neglects her child. The Department of Social Services intervened after an inci[illegible] of sexual abuse involving Elizabeth and one of her mother's [illegible]yfriends. The protective service worker knew of an approved family day care provider and placed Elizabeth in her care.

The family day care provider was not given the details of Elizabeth's background nor the incident that prompted intervention. The day care provider's husband was home most of the day because he was a night shift worker. Elizabeth was terrified of him because of her experiences with her mother's boyfriend. This anxiety might have been avoided had a more careful selection of a caregiver been made or supportive counseling been provided. Instead, Elizabeth further retreated into a shell while her

relationship with her mother deteriorated. Unaware of the reason for Elizabeth's anxiety over the presence of the day care provider's husband and seeing little improvement in the relationship between Elizabeth and her mother, the day care provider blamed Elizabeth's mother for her daughter's problems. This was communicated to Elizabeth and further strained the interactions among Elizabeth, her mother, and the day care provider. Better case planning and communications would have avoided this problem.

Realizing how often family day care is used in child protection and the critical importance of being sure the service is provided effectively, the Training for Child Care Project staff members have conducted several training sessions for family day care providers and for child protection workers on how to best use family day care in child protection cases. In addition, in April, 1979, the project convened a small task force consisting of child protection service workers, family day care providers, and family day care agency staff. The task force explored the problems and opportunities involved in using family day care as a child protection service. The information contained in this paper comes from the combined experience of Training for Child Care staff and members of the Task Force. To date, there seems to be little research or statistical documentation of how often family day care is used or how best to maximize the potential of family day care in treating child abuse and neglect. It is hoped that this paper can stimulate a more active concern with this issue and greater professional investigation and involvement.

WHAT IS A CHILD PROTECTION SERVICE?

In every state, there is a law which offers protection to children when abuse or neglect occur. The law designates a specific unit of state government (usually called the child protection agency) with responsibility for investigation of incidents of suspected abuse or neglect. In life-threatening

situations the child protection agency has the power to take immediate custody of a child. In less severe cases the child protection agency must present its findings to a court. If the court confirms that child abuse or neglect has occurred, the child protection agency is given a continuing responsibility to offer protection to the child while implementing a comprehensive plan to treat the parents or other individual who committed the act of abuse or neglect. Sometimes the treatment plan can best be achieved if the child and parents are completely separated for a short period of time. In such cases foster care or, sometimes, institutional placements are used. In some cases it may not be possible to reunite children with their natural parents. Then the court terminates parental rights, and the child protection agency attempts to find permanent homes in which the children are adopted.

However, there is need for more alternatives in the treatment of child abuse and neglect because of the increase in caseloads and the shortage of foster care homes.

In recent years, the problems of child abuse and neglect have been the focus of widespread public concern, and legislation requiring professionals and the public to report suspected abuse and neglect cases has been strengthened. The creation of the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect, which funds regional child abuse and neglect resource centers and demonstration projects, has enabled local agencies to try new approaches to the problem of child abuse and neglect. This attention has resulted in significant increases in the reporting of child abuse and neglect and has created pressures on already understaffed child protection agencies, the traditional resources for treatment.

Recent examination of the foster care and adoption system shows a picture of mismanagement, insufficient payments and inequities and inconsistencies in placement decisions, monitoring, and support. The average stay for a child in foster care, a supposedly temporary service, is seven years, and a child may be placed in three or four different foster homes during that period. In addition, foster homes are becoming more difficult to recruit because more women are working outside the home.

For some children an adoption would be desirable, but there is often reluctance on the part of the courts to permanently sever family ties and recommend adoption. These children are then left in situations of long-term instability.

WHY IS FAMILY DAY CARE BEING CONSIDERED AS A RESOURCE IN CHILD PROTECTION CASES?

In many cases there is enough strength in families to allow treatment to take place without totally removing the children from the home. This approach eliminates the kind of trauma that occurs when children are completely separated from key persons in their lives and is designed to decrease the inappropriate use of foster care or adoption. As child protection experts have emphasized the use of family strengthening practices, the need has developed for alternative supportive resources, such as homemaker services, emergency respite care, and day care. Day care, whether provided at a center or a family day care home, can be an effective alternative since it provides relief from pressure for part of the day and makes it possible to give counseling and support to both parents and children. It also allows daily observation of the children to be sure abuse is not continuing.

In choosing between a day care center and a family day care home, a child protection agency is often influenced by the same factors which influence many parents to choose family day care:

> Family day care is readily available and not constrained by waiting lists common to day care centers. The home-like environment of family day care is particularly appropriate for the care of children under the age of three.
>
> Family day care homes are also suitable for older children in the family, providing before- and after-school care and permitting siblings to remain together. The informality of the program and convenient neighborhood location enable family day care homes to handle emergencies.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF FAMILY DAY CARE AS A CHILD PROTECTION SERVICE?

For the Children

Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect can cause children to suffer from short- and long-term physical, mental, and emotional damage. Children who already have problems are more likely to be the victims of child abuse and neglect. Abused children often are sickly, functionally retarded, and timid or aggressive. They may also have low self concepts, language problems, physical disabilities, and poor nutrition. While struggling to cope with existing problems, these children become saddled with the emotional burdens of being abused and then separated from their families. They are confused about their feelings for their parents -- loving them and fearing them,

but usually protecting them and denying that their parents were responsible for reported abuse. They often place the blame on themselves and feel insecure.

These children need security and a consistent and active listener. They need a considerable period of adjustment in a stable environment, where they can develop feelings of trust. The new environment should not be too great a departure from what they are used to at home. There should be structure to the environment, but flexibility within it. Abused children, more than others, need time and a place to rest, to be outdoors, and be exposed to therapeutic play. In addition, there should be opportunities to do things for themselves and learn about the importance of health, personal hygiene, and nutrition.

An effectively trained and supported family day care provider can offer, for a part of each day, the special attention and sensitive environment needed by abused and neglected children so they can thrive.

For the Parents

Parents who have abused or neglected their children are labled by society as incompetent parents. They often feel remorse and lose respect for themselves. There need not be actual mental illness in abusive parents. Rather, abuse occurs when insecure parents, under stress, lose control when responding to a child's behavior. Often these parents have been victims of child abuse themselves. This fact heightens the importance of treating both the parents and the children. The most helpful treatments for parents are acceptance, counseling, education in parenting, and help in coping with their personal problems.

Family day care providers can become part of a helping team for families, along with caseworkers and counselors. This use of family day care enhances the ability of the community to take responsibility for the care and support of families. Providers can offer support and become role models for parents learning child development skills and behaviors. This is especially helpful to teenage parents who are relatively inexperienced in child rearing.

As parents bring the children to and from family day care homes, there is opportunity for daily contact and face-to-face talks between parents and providers. These talks can be reassuring for a parent confronting the aftermath of child abuse and neglect, and are particularly important in rural areas where families are often isolated from one another.

Parents seem pleased with family day care as a placement alternative rather than permanent removal. Almost always, they feel that they cannot cope if the children are with them all of the time, and family day care gives a good amount of free time. Thus, family day care keeps the family together and simultaneously reduces the pressures on parents while treatment is carried out.

For the Child Protection Workers

Despite its critical importance, the child protection system in many communities does not function at an ideal level. While most communities have increased the number of child protection workers in recent years, this effort has not kept pace with the increased demands for service. Thus, most protective service workers have large caseloads, and even the most conscientious workers are forced to give their attention to those families most in need.

Child protection work is emotionally draining and rarely performed with an adequate amount of time and resources. Many child protection workers become frustrated and leave their jobs after a few years. The unusually high turnover rate among workers contributes to some of the lack of consistency and continuity in treating families.

Family day care providers can be supportive to child protection workers because the family day care providers see the children and usually the parents every day. This is usually much more contact than the child protection workers are able to offer. The family day care providers can use this extra time to help the children and to offer guidance to parents about child rearing matters. In some cases family day care providers have taken on supporting roles for other treatment goals for families. For example, one day care provider, who also transported children, volunteered to drive a parent to an employment training program. Other providers have counseled parents on health and personal matters. The roles of the day care providers will vary depending on the needs of each particular case and on the skills of individual providers. Such activities should be according to a plan which is coordinated with other professionals involved with the treatment of the family.

Sometimes providers serve monitoring functions. They may become aware of new incidents of mistreatment of the children and report these to the child protection workers, or on a happier note, they may observe progress in the parent-child relationship and share this information. Thus, family day care providers can be instrumental in supporting the work of the child protection agency.

HOW CAN WE MAXIMIZE FAMILY DAY CARE AS A RESOURCE FOR CHILD PROTECTION?

The following factors should be considered when an agency responsible for child protection service intends to use family day care for neglected or abused children:

Careful Selection of Providers. It should be recognized that not all family day care providers can or should assume the added responsibility of taking care of troubled children and dealing with their parents and caseworkers. It is most important that family day care providers understand that saying "no" when they feel uncomfortable with the responsibility is probably the most positive help they can offer a child and his family.

It is often a temptation to make arrangements for an abused or neglected child on the basis of convenience -- by locating a family day care provider geographically close to the family. However, the setting, willingness, attitude, and professional characteristics of the provider are far more important than the geographic location.

It is important to consider the other children being cared for -- their ages and the demands they make on the provider for their care. It is particularly important to consider the provider's own children and the potential for conflict if the abused child is close in age and requires a great deal of special attention.

The provider must also possess the proper attitude toward the parent, showing acceptance and avoiding criticism. An abusive parent needs a

supportive and nonjudgmental person to whom he or she can entrust the care of his/her children. Negative attitudes on the part of the provider toward parents only make the situation worse.

In choosing a family day care home consideration should be given to the values and attitudes of the provider, the cultural compatability with the family, and the probability that the home will continue to be available as long as necessary.

Involvement of the Family Day Care Provider in the Treatment Plan. The primary goals of the treatment plan are to place the child in a safe environment and simultaneously rehabilitate the parent. For this to occur, the relationship between the provider and caseworker must be established and maintained throughout the design and implementation of the treatment plan. Involving the provider in the decision making is important so that she will be clear about the family situation, special needs of the child, and the legal issues involved. Understanding the basis for the treatment plan enables the provider to pay attention to areas of concern and reinforce the treatment provided by the caseworker. The close monitoring of the plan can assure that the plan is going well and that problems are dealt with quickly.

Examining the Protective Service Process. Child protection agencies need to share significant and sometimes confidential information with the provider. It is crucial that the family day care provider know the family background and have some awareness of the treatment plan if she is to function as a team member with the caseworker and the parent. The provider is then in

a better position to prevent an unpleasant situation for the child, such as occurred with Elizabeth.

In some states, written policy may seem to prevent the child protection agency from releasing confidential information to a family day care provider. In these cases it may be necessary to advocate a change in policy. In the long run the family day care provider must be looked at as a professional person with an important contribution to make to the treatment process. The state agency will need to recognize this professional status and share information on the same basis as with any other professional person who is asked to become involved with the case. At the same time, the child protection agency should recognize that few family day care providers have experienced formal training about the concept of "confidentiality" or an explanation of the professional responsibility to keep secure information that is shared on a confidential basis. Thus, the child protection agency will need to include this information in training sessions for providers and in some form of written instructions.

Similarly, the provider should receive a step-by-step explanation of how the child protection system operates, including its legal basis. In one case example, the court had removed legal custody from the child's parents. When the parents later appeared at the provider's home and demanded to take the child, the provider realized that she had no instruction on how to handle this situation. Fortunately, the child protection worker was available by phone and the problem was handled quickly.

In some communities day care providers are not involved in the planning and ongoing treatment process simply because the caseworker is too burdened with other responsibilities to take on the task of training the providers. In most instances, however, the problem lies in an assumption by the child protection system that the role of the provider is simply to "babysit" for children while the caseworker does the work of counseling parents. As undesirable as this assumption may be, it is still fairly prevalent. Hopefully, as more discussion takes place on the many ways family day care providers can contribute to the child protection effort, this situation will change.

Administrative Issues. The care of an abused or neglected child is likely to be more demanding than that for an ordinary child who is being cared for while parents work. The abused or neglected child is in a stressful period and needs special attention. In the ideal situation, the provider will have had specialized training and will work closely with the parent and a team of supportive professionals. In a few states, day care providers receive a higher fee for caring for children in cases of neglect or abuse than for other children. This is a reasonable practice and should be extended. Also, in some communities, the child protection agency and a family day care agency are experimenting with the concept of "therapeutic family day care homes." These family day care providers specialize in caring for neglected and abused children. Such providers receive more intense training and have consultant resources assigned to help with questions related to the physical and emotional health of the families and their children.

In some communities, family day care providers are paid a fee only for the days the child actually attends. The very nature of the problem recognizes

that the abused or neglected child's family is unstable and, therefore, absences are likely to occur. Payment policies should not penalize the family day care provider for her willingness to serve this type of family by not allowing her payments for some missed days.

Licensing requirements in some areas state that a child must be immunized before placing him/her in a family day care home. This creates obstacles for placing children in family day care on an emergency basis. In some states licensing requirements prohibit a person from serving as a family day care provider and a foster parent at the same time. There are advantages and disadvantages to such a regulation and further examination of this issue will be necessary before any licensing agency makes a firm policy on this topic.

Professional Supports. Most family day care providers are self-employed and entirely independent. They are contacted by local child protection service workers who have authority to secure family day care on a "purchase of services" arrangement.

Some family day care providers are affiliated with a family day care agency, an organization (public or private) which assumes legal responsibility for administering and supervising a system of family day care homes. The agency is primarily responsible for establishment of policy, for recruitment and screening of homes, and for ongoing training and supervision. The agency may be responsible for placement of children, for payment to caregivers, and for providing information and referral or social services to parents. As a general rule, family day care providers who are affiliated with a family day care agency seem to be most effective in caring for children in protective service cases.

The existence of a local family day care agency can benefit the providers, caseworkers, and families involved. The agency takes on a broker function, often mediating between parent-provider, provider-caseworker, and caseworker-parent. The agency can also serve as a monitor and sponsor for obtaining special project funds, training, and administrative assistance. The network of family day care homes that grows as a result of agency efforts can increase the capabilities of individual homes through sharing resources, learning and mutual support. The agency can be particularly supportive to providers by serving a "hotline" function. That is, by providing immediate information or advice to providers who are experiencing crises with children or families.

Day care providers may be required to play unpleasant roles should cases involve the courts. Providers may be called to testify about the nature of the abuse and neglect situation. The family day care agency can be instrumental in easing this burden by supplying documentation to corroborate the evidence offered by the providers. This would include records of contacts between the providers, the agency, and the caseworkers that pinpoint the time when problems first became apparent.

The family day care agency can help reduce turnover among providers by monitoring and offering proper support and guidance. This will also prevent the providers from requesting removal of children because they feel inadequate to cope by themselves with difficult situations.

The family day care agency can provide assistance to the child protection workers by keeping them informed and notifying them when problems or changes occur in children's status. The family day care agency can reduce the child

protection workers' load by conducting home studies or recruiting and selecting family day care homes. The family day care agency can keep files on available family day care homes so that, at any given time, they know about openings.

In some cases, a family day care agency has offered specialized services for parents, such as the provision of volunteers as home visitors or the sponsorship of Parents Anonymous programs.

Training. Providers should be trained prior to accepting abused or neglected children. They should be familiar with the psychological makeup of the families who have experienced child abuse and neglect and with the special needs of the children.

Local family day care agencies may be ideal trainers for providers. One-to-one training is the most effective, but workshops and seminars may also be useful in understanding the dynamic of abusing parents and learning special skills for meeting the needs of abused children and their families.

Termination of Care. Providers accepting child protection cases for care need to know that the placements may be of relatively short terms. If the home situation deteriorates and the child's life and safety is threatened, a different placement must be made quickly. Sometimes if the child has been in family day care for some time and has become especially attached to the care-giver, the day care arrangement may be continued for a time to allow for a planned separation process.

If the treatment goes well, the family may resume full-time care of the child and not need to continue day care, or the family may not be able to

afford to continue day care on its own. In these cases all parties involved should be aware that changes are imminent and prepare for them. It should be the responsibility of the child protection workers to initiate the planning. Unfortunately, adequate preparation does not always take place and so the children sometimes just do not appear again. This can be quite traumatic to family day care providers who have become involved with the children and their families.

CONCLUSION

Much more needs to be known about the use of family day care as a resource for child protection services. There is need for pilot projects in which the procedures can be refined and results documented. In the meantime, it will continue to be a subject for discussion when family day care providers come together.